
Deepening Democracy: Civil Society and Local Governance in India

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Deficits of Representative Democracy

- Even with consolidated representative institutions, uneven distribution of democratic capabilities produces unequal influence
 - Literature assumes associational autonomy
 - Uneven rule of law (O'Donnell's "brown areas")
 - Pervasive social exclusions
 - Limited accountability of state actors and institutions
 - Imbalance between political and civil society results in instrumentalization of politics
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“They are trying to adapt themselves far too much to the old order and trying to justify it... What is far worse is that we are losing the high position that we have built up, with so much labor, in the hearts of the people. *We are sinking to the level of ordinary politicians.*”
Nehru writing to Gandhi about Congress ministers.

Democratic Deepening: Strengthening Civil Society

- If citizenship is less a bundle of rights granted to an individual (citizenship as legal status) than a set of relationships through which modern political actors are constituted (an instituted process):
 - 1) Democratic capabilities have to be equalized across social categories
 - 2) Democratic dispositions have to be cultivated
 - Recognizing others as rights-bearing citizens
 - Public mindedness
 - Citizens are made in civil society
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The Challenge of Democratic Deepening

- **Horizontal (Associational) Problem**

Do all citizens enjoy equal associational capacities?

- Barriers to association (social exclusion)

- **Vertical (Institutional) Problem**

Can all citizens effectively engage the state as citizens?

- Quality of engagement: mode of intermediation
 - Surface area of engagement
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What difference can local participation make?

- Improving Accountability of State
 - Strengthen ties between citizens and state officials
 - More direct participation can benefit local development
 - Tap into local demands and knowledge
 - Better targeting and feedback
 - Stake in local government increases legitimacy of institution
 - Practicing democracy
 - Putting political and civic rights to use
 - Building democratic norms
 - Thickening civic ties
 - Improves public discussion
 - Resolving conflicts
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Local democratic government in India: no there there?

- No local elections before 1993
 - No local developmental capacity
 - Line-department domination – bureaucratic authoritarianism?
 - Powerful intermediaries
 - No local public sphere
 - Where do citizens make themselves?
 - Resort to primary structures?
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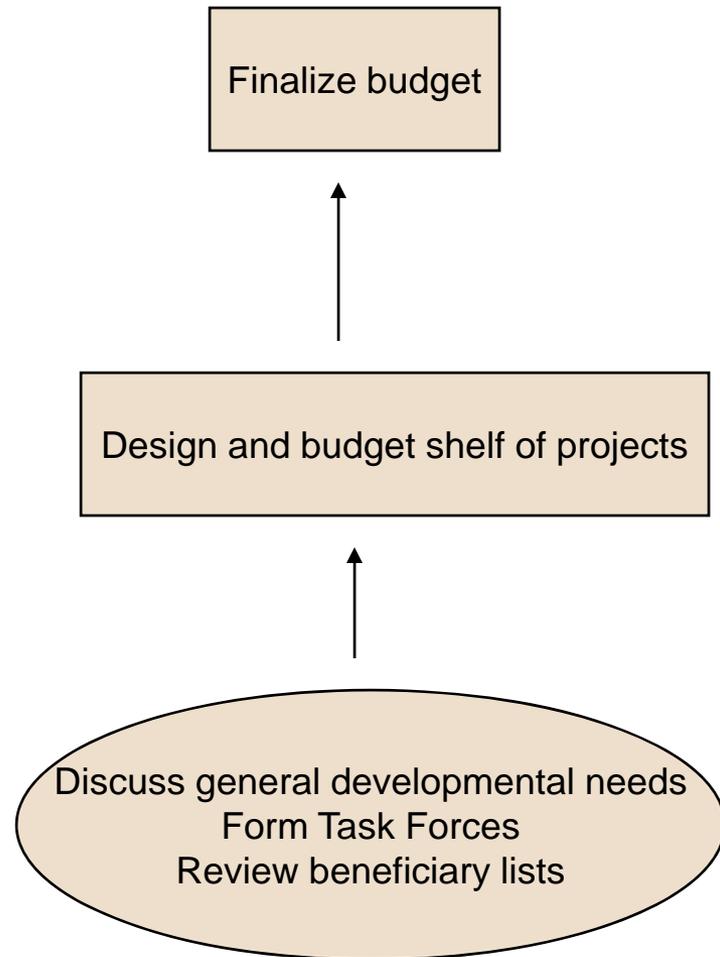
Panchayati Raj: a Silent Revolution?

- Very little reliable data
 - Implementation left to states
 - Elections held
 - 240,000 new institutions; 3,600,000 new representatives, with reservations
 - Some devolution of resources
 - Three categories of performance
 - Pre-1993 reformers: West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka
 - Most states: Business as usual
 - Innovators: Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan
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Institutional Structure of Kerala's "People's Plan"

- **Panchayats** - 990
Average population: 28,000
Receive 30-35% of Plan Funds as Un-tied Grants
- **Task Forces:**
one per developmental sector –
membership includes line dept. official,
elected representative and citizens
- **Gram Sabhas**
Open popular assemblies held at ward
level 3 x year



Aggregate figures on participation in 990 Panchayats

Variable	Gram Sabha	
	1996-1997	1997-1998
Overall number of participants	1,736,865	1,784,847
Percentage of electorate that participated	10.3	10.6
Number of SC/ST participants	110,105	306,014
Percentage of participants SC/ST	6.3	17.2
Relative participation of SC & ST	0.53	1.44
Number of female participants	493,442	727,986
Percentage of participants women	28.4	40.8
Relative participation of women	0.57	0.82

Table 1

Respondents' assessment of the magnitude and direction of the change in service delivery and development as result of the campaign

Indicator (quality, accessibility, and/or level, depending on indicator)	Fraction of respondents who said situation in panchayat had:					No. of respondents
	Deteriorated		No change	Improved		
	Significantly	Some		Some	Significantly	
Primary health care	0.3	1.2	9.1	66.1	23.4	816
Child-care and child development	0.2	0.5	1.6	36.5	61.2	825
Primary education	0.1	0.7	16.8	60.9	21.5	806
Drinking water	0.0	1.4	8.2	48.1	42.3	813
Sanitation	0.3	0.4	9.3	48.5	41.7	811
Housing for the poor	0.1	0.5	0.8	28.3	70.3	832
Assistance to poor	0.0	0.3	10.5	56.9	32.4	809
Roads	0.2	0.2	3.1	34.1	62.3	827
Irrigation facilities	0.3	1.6	13.1	61.7	23.4	811
Support for agricultural cultivators	0.2	1.1	8.5	61.8	28.4	821
Income and employment creation	0.3	1.1	25.9	62.7	10.0	807
Income and employment for women	0.1	0.7	17.7	56.1	25.4	816
Income and employment for SCs or STs	0.3	0.6	21.1	56.9	21.2	807

Table 2
Fraction (%) of respondents, by category and indicator, who felt situation in panchayat had improved (some or significantly) as a result of the Campaign

Respondent category	Primary Health	Child care	Primary education	Drinking water	Sanitation	Housing
Panchayat member from ruling party or coalition	92.0	98.7	88.2	96.1	97.4	97.4
Panchayat member from opposition	85.9	95.4	73.4	87.3	89.1	100.0
Head of local branch of ruling party	87.7	95.4	87.7	92.3	92.4	100.0
Head of local branch of main opposition party	80.3	90.3	65.6	79.4	77.8	95.2
Panchayat secretary	95.3	98.5	85.7	95.3	95.3	98.5
Panchayat-level implementing officer	92.6	96.4	84.9	86.8	86.8	98.2
Other line department official	90.8	100.0	84.4	87.5	84.4	98.5
Civilian task force member	96.7	100.0	86.4	91.8	93.3	100.0
Representative of caste or religious organization	74.6	100.0	71.7	88.5	86.5	96.3
Representative of labor union or farmers' association	96.7	98.4	84.5	88.3	86.4	98.4
Representative of development NGO	92.4	96.9	84.9	92.4	92.4	100.0
Representative of women's group	90.3	100.0	87.3	93.8	95.2	100.0
Representative of SC or ST organization	85.7	100.0	83.6	93.6	91.9	98.4

Which group had the most influence over the selection of beneficiaries?

Respondent category	Fraction of respondents (by category) who said:					
	Powerful private citizens	Particular panchayat members	All panchayat members	Govt. officials	Taskforce members	Gram sabha
Panchayat member from ruling party	1.3	2.7	17.3	0.0	13.3	62.7
Panchayat member from opposition	6.1	12.1	12.1	0.0	12.1	47.0
Head of local branch of opposition party	11.1	25.4	14.3	0.0	11.1	28.6
Panchayat secretary	0.0	6.2	9.2	0.0	15.4	52.3
Panchayat-level implementing officer	1.6	4.8	14.3	0.0	22.2	41.3
Representative of development org.	2.9	11.8	20.6	0.0	10.3	42.7
Representative of women's group	1.5	4.5	20.9	1.5	7.5	53.7
Representative of SC or ST organization	1.6	14.5	17.7	0.0	17.7	37.1
Overall	3.3	10.3	16.9	0.4	14.5	44.1

Kerala: Orchestrating Participation

- Inclusion of women and SC/ST
 - Women well represented in Task Forces (30%)
 - SC well represented in Task Forces (12%)
 - Task Forces = embedding the local state
 - 56 % of TF members = civil society
 - 19% = party activists
 - GS demands were incorporated through Task Forces into Panchayat plans and budgets.
 - Elected representatives are de facto responsive to participatory planning
 - Increased accountability of politicians and government officials
 - Results hold across party affiliation and respondent category
 - Increase in associational activity during the campaign.
 - biggest increase was women's groups and NGOs
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Problems

- From campaign mode to systems stabilization
 - Limited local institutional capacity to plan and budget
 - delays in spending money
 - leakage
 - Panchayat plans were often little more than a set of projects, rather than carefully integrated proposals for promoting development
 - Serious coordination problems in integrating Panchayat plans into higher levels of government
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Madhya Pradesh: Engineering Participation

- Significant fiscal devolution
 - Sectoral schemes
 - Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS)
 - Any panchayat can request primary school
 - 31,00 schools; 2 million students
 - Higher retention rates, lower teacher absenteeism, higher literacy
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Openings from above, change from below

- Kerala
 - Synergy of political and civil society
 - competition and programmatic parties
 - civil society as agent of change
 - KSSP (Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad)
 - embedded reform

 - Madhya Pradesh
 - seizing opportunities
 - the Centre
 - second democratic upsurge
 - the pincer strategy
 - Para professionals
 - Special purpose delivery vehicles
 - reform mongering
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Possibilities for Democratic Deepening

- Making spaces
 - Against the pernicious myth of local incapacity
 - The plasticity of participation
 - Creating local democratic spaces can lead to increased agency
 - Institutional design matters
 - Changing the balance of transaction costs
 - Blurring boundaries (activist bureaucracies)
 - Configurations of reform
 - Openings from above
 - Circumventing vested interests
 - Embedding strategies
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Defining *Democratic* Civil Society

a realm of voluntary social action that is institutionally differentiated from the state, market and primary community and that is governed by communicative practices. The actors in civil society are publicly-minded individuals and associations who share some basic norms of interaction (non-violence, pluralism, right to speak) and interact to form a range of publics. The space in which these actors contend (argue, debate, persuade) and sometimes coordinate (reach agreement) is the public sphere. The telos (though not the teleology) of civil society is the formation of a solidary community through public debate.

The Case for Participation

“Public debates and discussions, permitted by political freedoms and civil rights, can also play a major part in the formation of values. Indeed, even the identification of needs cannot but be influenced by the nature of public participation and dialogue. Not only is the force of public discussion one of the correlates of democracy ... but its cultivation can also make democracy itself function better ... Valuable as democracy is as a major source of social opportunity ... there is also the need to examine ways and means of making it function well, to realize its potentials. The achievement of social justice depends not only on institutional forms (including democratic rules and regulations), but also on effective practice. ... This a challenge that is faced both by well-established democracies such as the United States (especially with the differential participation of diverse racial groups) and by new democracies”

Amartya Sen, *Development As Freedom*, 2000:158-159
